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SUBJECT: LOGISTICS REMAIN A CHALLENGE AS ELECTION DAY APPROACHES

REF: GUATEMALA 1515

¶1. Summary: With election day only a month away, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) has yet to launch an information campaign to tell citizens how and where to vote and implementation of the bold voting place decentralization plan does not appear to have advanced. Compliance with new campaign finance regulations aimed at promoting greater transparency and accountability has been spotty. At the local level, political violence, especially in the narco-region of Jutiapa, has eliminated some candidates and deterred others from running for local office. Despite generalized concerns that the TSE has prepared poorly for the elections, most observers do not expect its poor performance on election day to be significant unless the vote count is close. End summary.

#### Decentralized Voting Centers

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¶2. As part of efforts to promote greater access to and participation in the political process, the Congress enacted a decentralization plan, increasing the number of voting centers throughout the country to reach rural areas. Up to 1.2 million citizens who updated their voter registry information reside in remote rural areas, many of whom will have to vote in new precincts created as part of the decentralization plan. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), however, has yet to identify where these new centers will be and inform citizens of how and where to vote on election day.

¶3. Domestic and international observation missions have stressed the need for an information campaign as quickly as possible, warning that failure to inform rural voters of the voting process may create confusion and long waiting lines, as well as put into question the credibility of results in those areas. According to the OAS technical assistance office, the TSE has obligated and spent only 32 percent of its budget as of the end of July and is likely to return funds to the Treasury after the elections because of its inability to approve contracts and expenses in a timely manner.

#### Campaign Finance

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¶4. Under new regulations approved by the TSE, all political parties are required to report all expenditures during the electoral period. Expenses cannot exceed Q44 million (USD 5.8 million) per political party.

¶5. According to Accion Ciudadana estimates, a member of national election observation network Mirador Electoral, the three leading political parties (UNE, PP, and GANA) have already exceeded the yearly cap and the budget they presented to the TSE. They calculate PP has spent Q60.3 million (USD 7.9 million) on publicity, but reported expenditures of only Q40 million (USD 5.3 million). UNE spent Q47.3 million (USD 6.2 million) on publicity, but reported spending only Q44 (USD 5.8 million). GANA spent Q44.2 (USD 5.8 million) on publicity, while reporting total expenditures of Q42.2 million (USD 5.6 million). Accion Ciudadana bases its estimates on normal advertising charges by the media and does not have actual expense information from the parties. No criminal sanctions have

been imposed for non-compliance due to lack of an election crimes law, and TSE has not imposed civil penalties on the parties.

#### Political Violence

¶6. A total of 58 cases of political violence, including 38 murders, were reported over the past year, according to the Central American Institute for Political Studies (INCEP). Of the 38 murders, 17 were members of the party of presidential front-runner Alvaro Colom (UNE), including a congressional representative and a mayor, or their family members. All major parties have had activities and in some cases mayoral candidates killed.

¶7. Comment: Local and international observers have expressed concerns over the TSE's lack of logistical organization and efficiency, especially the delay in implementing the decentralized voting centers and informing the public of the details of the voting process.

Derham